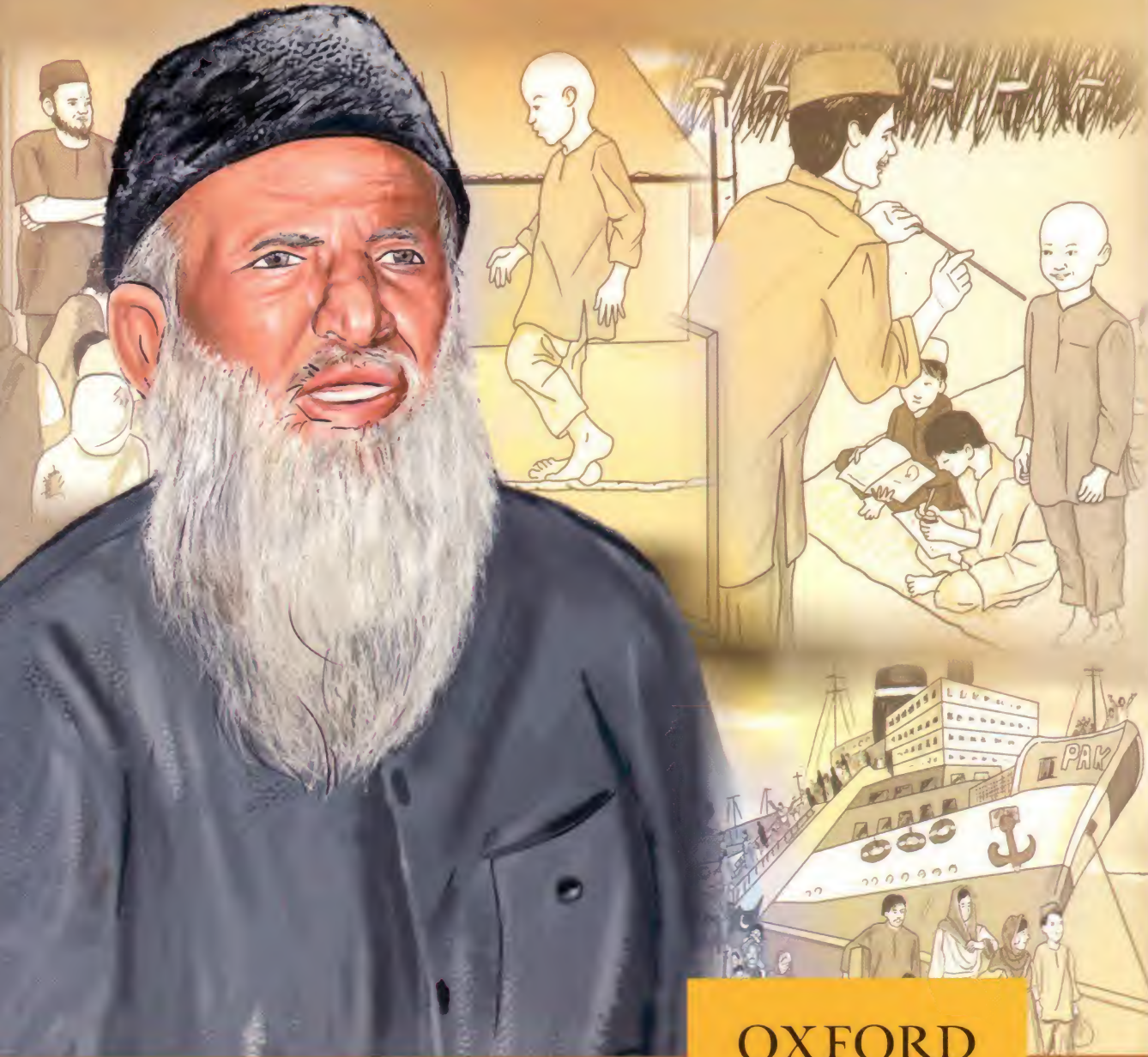


AMINA AZFAR



GRAPHIC STORIES

# ABDUL SATTAR EDHI



OXFORD



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UNIVERSITY PRESS



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Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.  
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,  
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Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

Published in Pakistan by  
Ameena Saiyid, Oxford University Press  
No. 38, Sector 15, Korangi Industrial Area,  
PO Box 8214, Karachi-74900, Pakistan

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First Edition published in 2013

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ISBN 978-0-19-906907-1

Second Impression 2015

Printed on 67gsm imported offset paper

Printed by Kagzi Printers, Karachi

Acknowledgements

Illustrations by Aslam Bashir

We are grateful to Mr Abdul Sattar Edhi and Mrs Bilquis Edhi for their help.  
The facts in this graphic novel about the life of Mr Abdul Sattar Edhi have been  
derived from the book *Abdul Sattar Edhi, An Autobiography: A Mirror to the Blind*,  
as narrated to Tehmina Durrani.

East of Sindh lies the Indian state of Gujarat. In Kathiawar, which is a part of Gujarat, there is a town called Bantwa. Abdul Sattar Edhi's parents, Abdul Shakoor Edhi and Hawwa Bai lived in this town. Abdul Shakoor came from a Memon family of traders. Like the rest of their family, Abdul Shakoor and his household lived simply and saved their money.

Abdul Sattar Edhi was born in this family on 28 February 1928. A girl, Zubaida, and another boy Aziz were born some years later. Like their family the children lived a very simple life. They slept on cotton-filled mattresses laid on the floor. Early in the morning Abdul Sattar would take down the cooking pots and pans from the top of a cupboard, and in the evening after the day's cooking was done and his mother had washed them, he would put them back. Among the pots was one that was never needed. Abdul Sattar began to secretly put his savings in that pot. This was how at an early age he learned the family habit of saving money.







The work Edhi's father did took him on frequent journeys. Whenever he came home he would have Edhi's head shaved. That was how Edhi became known as 'Roti', which means chapatti. Perhaps his shaved head reminded people of a chapatti!

Edhi was mischievous, and along with his friends he would play pranks on his neighbours, often frightening them with his imitation of animal sounds. Sometimes, he and the other children would show them circus tricks.





Right from the beginning Edhi's mother taught him to help the needy. Each day when he was going to school she would give him two paisas.

When Edhi returned from school...

Here, son. Keep one paisa for yourself. Give the other to someone who needs it.



I bought this guava from a hawker—have some.



Did he give you just half a guava for one paisa? What did you do with the other paisa?

Ammi, I'm back. Where are you?

I am making chapattis for you. Come and eat.

There's a boy in my class who gets no breakfast because his mother is ill. I gave half my guava to him and bought him some gram as well with the other paisa.

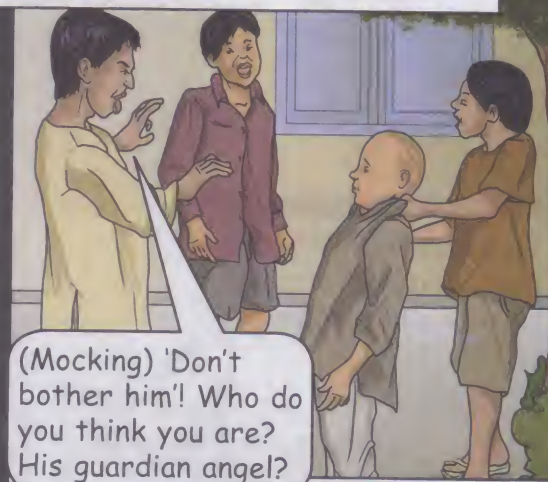


You did well.





One day some big boys were harassing a poor ailing man. Edhi was watching them from behind a tree.

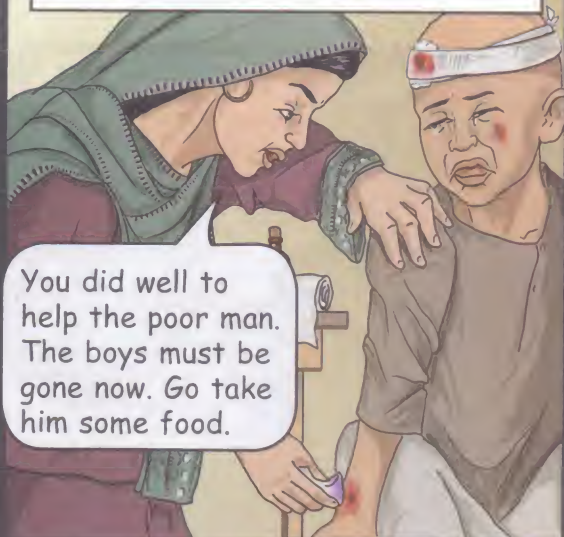


Releasing the man, the boys turned on Edhi and beat him up.





Wounded, Edhi finally escaped and went home.



You did well to help the poor man. The boys must be gone now. Go take him some food.

After he finished the food, the man prayed for Edhi: God willing, your name will be known far and wide.

After this incident, Edhi's sympathy for the suffering became even deeper.

After he had passed class 4 Edhi left school, and at age 11 he got a job in a cloth shop. Four other boys worked with him. Edhi's salary was five rupees per month. Of these he would give four rupees to his mother and save one rupee.

The boys swept and cleaned the shop. They also took bundles of cloth to people's homes where they sold the cloth to women who didn't go out because they observed purdah.



How much a yard for this georgette?

This georgette is from Mysore. It's very special. You won't get it for less than Rs 10 a yard anywhere.





The owner of the shop valued Edhi's work and his honesty. This made the other boys very jealous. One day they told the owner, 'Edhi steals the cloth, and...

He asks the customer for a higher price and keeps the extra money!

I saw him tie some money in his handkerchief.

You are lying! Abdul Sattar is very honest. He would never do this.

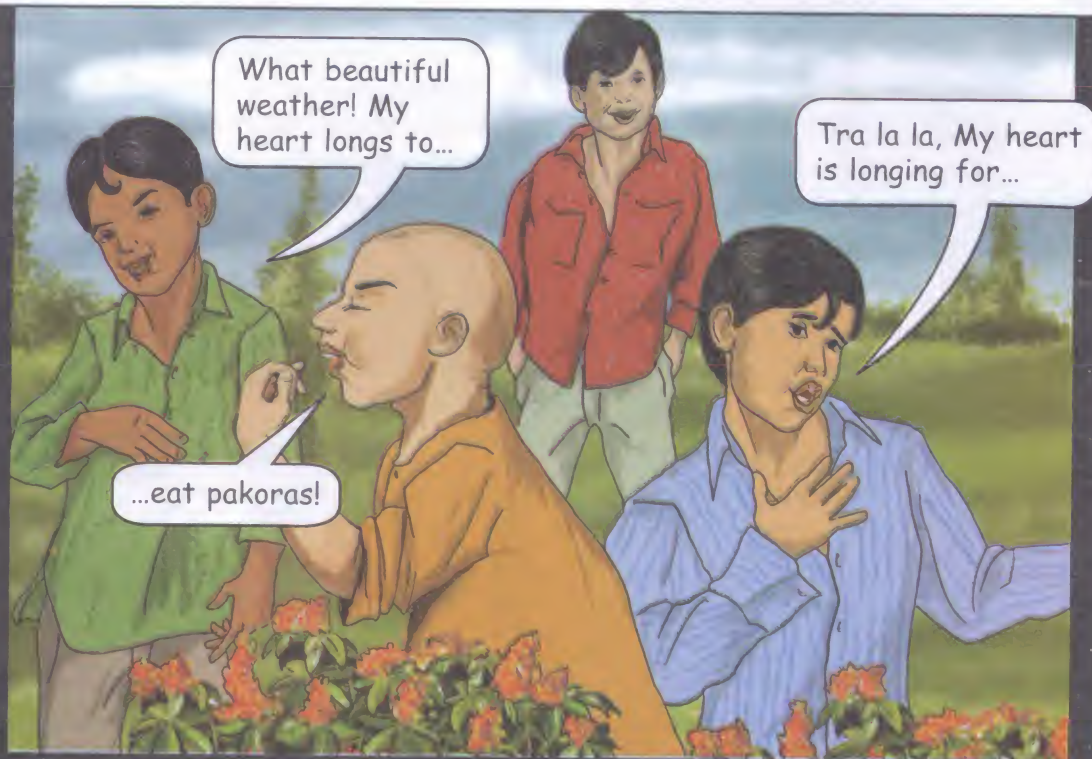
Soon after, Edhi left his job at the shop and following his mother's instructions, went back to school. He did well there, learning English and passing his exams with good marks. One day he and his friends decided to watch a movie—their first.

Tra la la, My heart longs for...

Ugh!  
The stink of perspiration!



For a long time after, Edhi's friends kept repeating the dialogue of this movie.



I am so hungry!  
I'll go home.





Edhi was tired of formal education, so two years later, at about 13, he left school. He often thought about what he was going to be when he grew up. He had more time to think about this when he was in the washroom.

Edhi had left school but he had begun to enjoy reading. He read about the thoughts of Marx and Lenin, and Hazrat Abu Zar Ghaffari(RA). He read about Karbala and other incidents in Islamic history. He also read some Russian literature. All this material he borrowed from libraries and found in Gujarati language magazines. He loved to read travelogues too. He was 14 now and spent a lot of time thinking. Sitting on a bench outside his house, or in the bathroom, he would think...

I'll sell matches by the roadside, and when I've saved enough from that I'll buy company shares. I'll spend half my money on the poor—build hospitals for them and a house for the disabled.

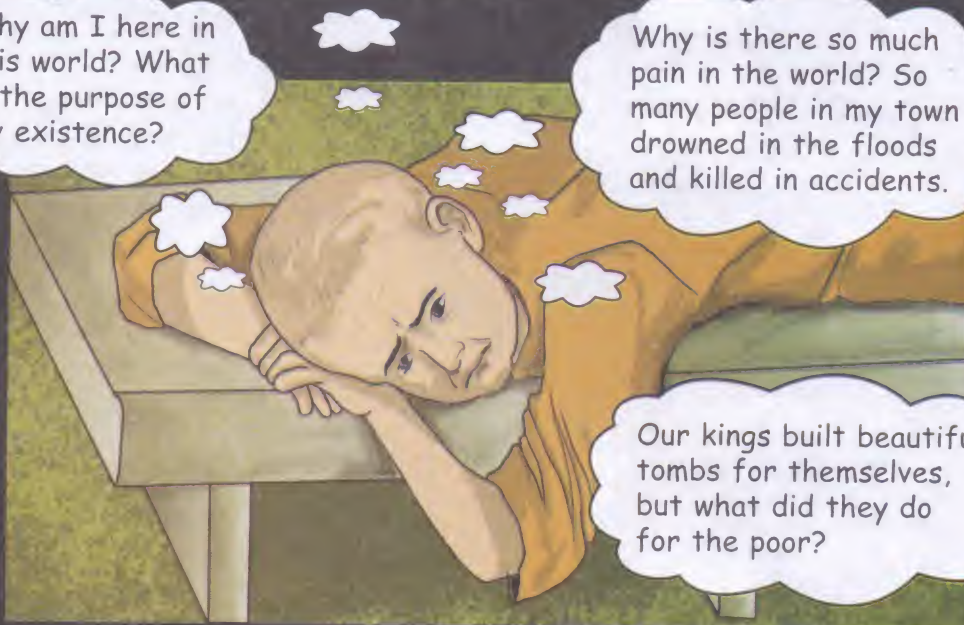


Happy and laughing one moment, into their graves the next!

Why am I here in this world? What is the purpose of my existence?

Why is there so much pain in the world? So many people in my town drowned in the floods and killed in accidents.

Our kings built beautiful tombs for themselves, but what did they do for the poor?





The boys make fun of me.  
But what do I care? While  
they wait for money, I'll see  
the whole world travelling  
on my two feet!

I'll see the world, every  
bit of it. What if I don't  
have money, I'll walk!



Quaid-e-Azam  
Mohammed Ali Jinnah  
came to Bantwa. He  
spoke to a large  
gathering, and told the  
Memon community,  
'Come to Pakistan.  
Bring your businesses  
there. You will prosper  
and Pakistan will  
prosper too.'



Pakistan  
zindabad!



Pakistan  
zindabad!

Edhi and his family arrived in Pakistan along with many others.



Edhi's family rented a room in a tall building in Chubba Gali near Jodia Bazaar and moved in. Around them the Memon community's businesses shone. Edhi's father used to say that if one really wanted to learn a trade one must start from the bottom. Edhi bought pencils, match boxes, and small towels from the wholesale market and sold them by the wayside.

Four annas for such a small towel! Make it two annas, child.



Pencils cost so much! I tell my children, 'What d'you want pencils for? Dip your finger in ink and write'. But the little ones say, 'If you don't give us pencils, our teacher will turn us into owls.'

Edhi would save the money he earned from selling pencils etc. He didn't spend it at all because he was planning to set up a dispensary with it.



Edhi's mother was in poor health. Edhi began spending more time at home to help her with the housework and look after his younger brother.

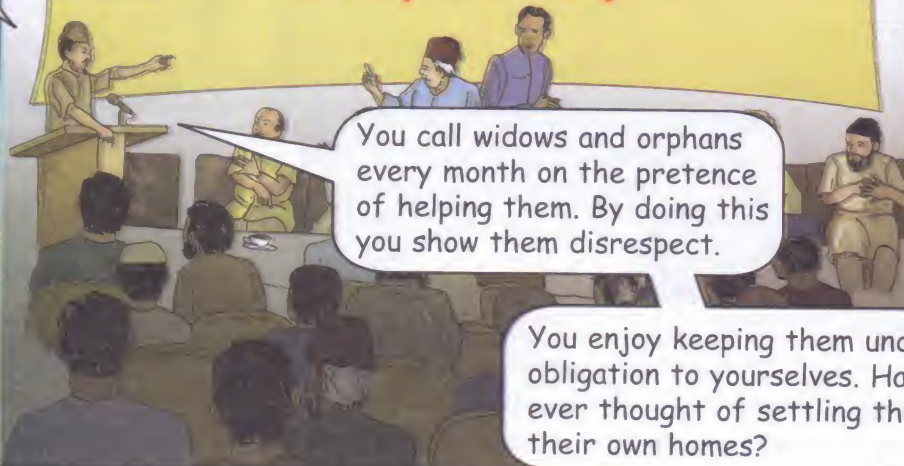




It was the year 1948. Edhi had started working in a cloth shop during the day. In the evening after the market closed, he worked in the Bantwa Memon Dispensary which was a welfare project. But it dispensed free medicines only to Memons. Edhi used to break this rule because he hated making distinctions among the poor and needy. So he gave free medicines to Memons as well as non-Memons. One day during a meeting of the welfare board he spoke out. He criticized board members who were much older than he. He criticized their work saying...

You use welfare work to advertise your generosity and goodness.

## Bantwa Memon Dispensary





The result was...

Get out!

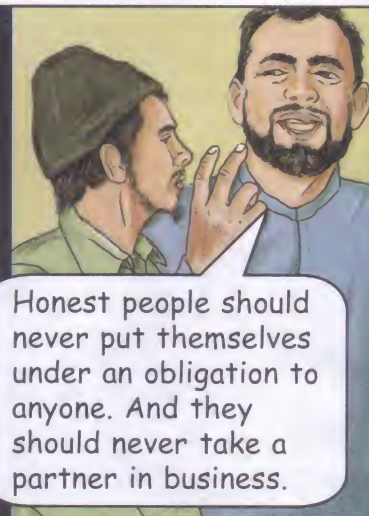
And don't dare to come back. No member of the Bantwa community will have anything to do with you.



Edhi's father gave him one more piece of advice.



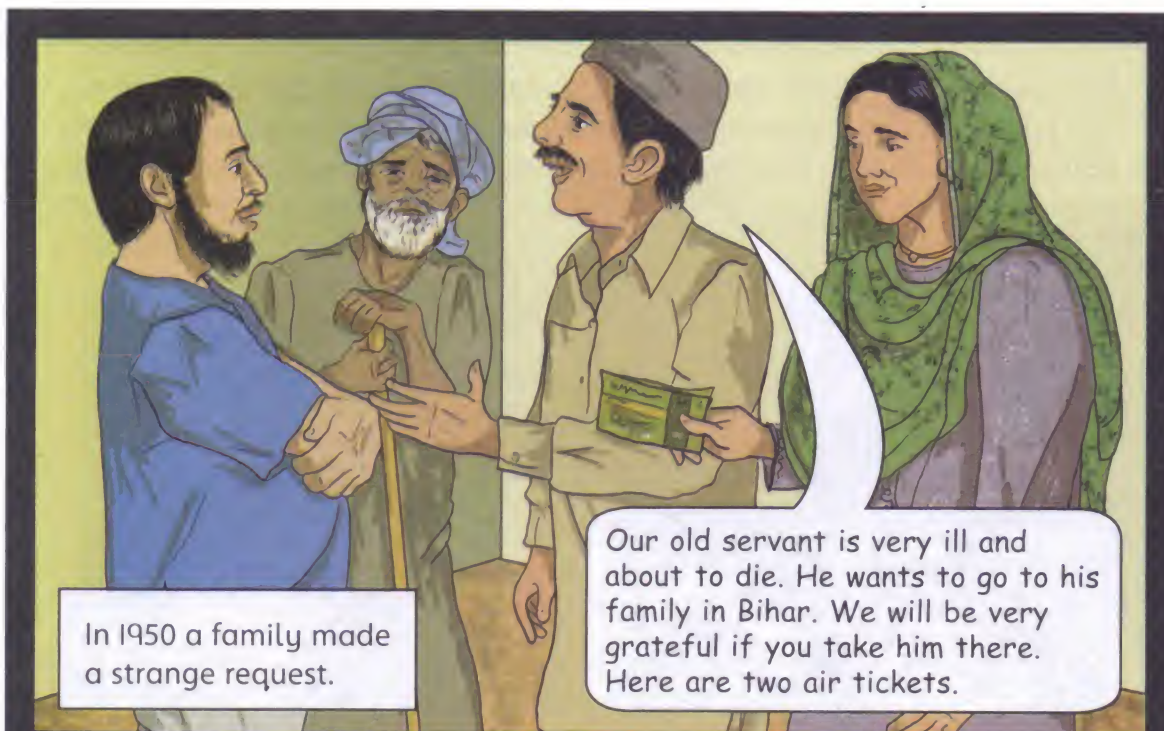
Son, they are harsh people and influential too. Now the whole Bantwa community is going to hound you. But don't let that worry you. The best way of dealing with this is to ignore them.



Honest people should never put themselves under an obligation to anyone. And they should never take a partner in business.

Edhi never forgot his father's advice.





Edhi could never refuse to help the poor. He also loved to travel. He took the old man to his home, where the man soon died. Edhi left for Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) where his half-brother lived. It was Edhi's first trip outside Pakistan. It fired the desire he always had for travelling.

In 1956 he put a few clothes, a blanket, some food, some cash, and his passport in a bag and boarded a bus for a journey to the west. He travelled through Iran, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, and went to many other countries of Europe. People saw him as a poor traveller and handed him small change, all of which Edhi saved for the dispensary he wanted to start in Pakistan.

Edhi saw the Europeans walk briskly on the roads; he saw them work efficiently. It seemed to him that the Europeans valued time and did not waste it. Perhaps the World Wars had taught them that the gift of life does not last forever!

In England, Edhi closely observed the welfare state and thought how it could be copied in Pakistan. It occurred to him that the essence of every religion is the welfare of humanity. Islam calls it *huqooqul ibad*. The thought of giving a better life to the poor and helpless in Pakistan was now a burning desire in Edhi's heart.



With the sum of Rs 2300 he had saved, Edhi bought a small shop in Karachi and turned it into a dispensary where medicines were sold cheaply. Over the dispensary he set up a maternity clinic, and started a training course for nurses.

Three-month nursing course for girls for only Rs 150!  
Your income as a nurse can make you independent.

The trainee nurses and those who were working in the maternity clinic soon learned that certain things infuriated Edhi.

Get out! I want no lazy, dishonest people here.



Edhi's mother had suffered a stroke. She was weak and helpless. Edhi used to look after her himself.

Unfortunately, I have become a burden for my family.

You are no burden, Amma! When I was a child you used to feed me, didn't you? Now the roles are reversed. Imagine that I am the mother and you my little child!



Sick, homeless old people and children would come and sit before the dispensary. They reminded Edhi of his helpless mother. Finally, he found a place for them over his dispensary and took up the responsibility of looking after them.



This was a time when there were just five ambulances in the whole of Sindh. When Edhi's mother needed to be taken to hospital no ambulance was available and they had to take her in a rickshaw.





One day a Memon businessman, who had closely observed the work that Edhi did, donated Rs 20,000 to the Edhi Dispensary. Edhi immediately spent Rs 7000 out of it, and bought an old blue van.

Edhi named the old blue van 'The Poor Man's Van', and drove it all over Sindh. In it he would drive the sick to hospital, or the dead for burial.




When someone is in trouble one doesn't look to see whether it is a friend or an enemy. One simply helps!

One day, the daughter of one of Edhi's enemies, a Memon Seth, fell from the roof of her house. Since no ambulance was available, Edhi was requested to come with his van. Edhi took the little girl to hospital though his friends tried to stop him.




In the wake of the old Hillman van came the Edhi Ambulance Service, which became the largest ambulance service in Pakistan, and is the first to reach the scene of a disaster.


Edhi was extremely busy running his homes for the poor and disabled, as well as his dispensary and maternity clinic. He slept little, but one night when an exhausted Edhi had fallen asleep he was woken up by a new voice...




Open the door!  
Open the door!  
A woman needs  
to go to the  
maternity  
clinic.



Am I dreaming?  
Who's this girl  
with her eyes  
full of stars?



The moonlight's  
playing tricks on  
me! Now where  
is the key?



Here's your  
key, hanging  
by the door.  
Now hurry  
up!



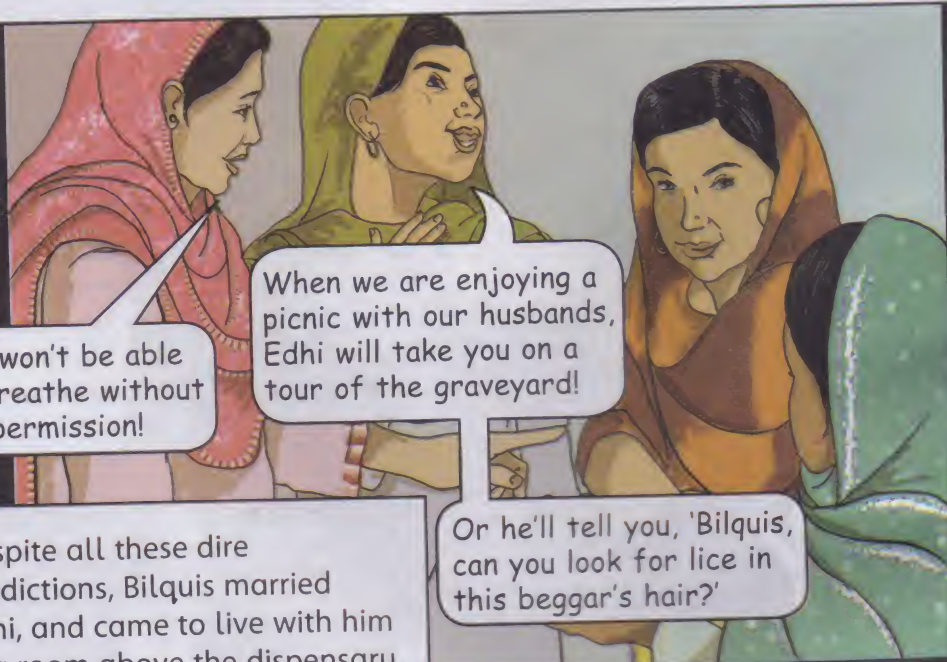
Soon, the girl Bilquis joined the nursing course. Edhi saw her come and go. He noticed that she was extremely efficient, a cheerful worker, and a happy person. Everyone who worked for Edhi was afraid of him and his short temper. Only Bilquis could smile calmly in his presence. This relaxed Edhi when she was around.

Really!  
Has he  
started  
living?



What's the matter with Edhi these days? He actually smiles, talks, and even laughs!

Edhi sent a message to Bilquis's mother saying he wished to marry her daughter. After consulting Bilquis, her mother agreed to the proposal. But Bilquis's friends and some others tried hard to dissuade her from marrying Edhi.



You won't be able to breathe without his permission!

When we are enjoying a picnic with our husbands, Edhi will take you on a tour of the graveyard!

Despite all these dire predictions, Bilquis married Edhi, and came to live with him in a room above the dispensary.

Or he'll tell you, 'Bilquis, can you look for lice in this beggar's hair?'



After her marriage, Bilquis became fully involved in her husband's work. She took up the responsibility of looking after all needy children, whether disabled or homeless, or left by their parents on garbage heaps or thrown in drains, either because their parents were too poor to keep them or for some other reason. Cradles were placed in front of Edhi Centres all over the country where parents could leave their unwanted children.



Children who are not adopted are brought up in the Edhi Centre where they are educated and taught what is needed to provide them a livelihood. Edhi Foundation does many kinds of social work: it has separate centres for poor and homeless children, destitute girls, and old people; it provides free meals to the poor; it also runs the 'Edhi Village' where drug addicts are rehabilitated.



There are many Edhi Centres in the different cities of Pakistan. Children brought up in these centres are very happy to see Edhi and Bilquis among them.

Maulana Abu's here!

Maulana Abu's here!

Maulana Abu's here!



Edhi Foundation also treats and looks after sick, wounded, and stray animals in its animal centres.



Edhi's workers are always quick to arrive in a crisis situation to help the victims. The Edhi Ambulance Service, the largest voluntary ambulance service in the world, now includes helicopters and planes.



Edhi also runs a cancer research centre where research is done on cancer, and patients of the disease are treated.

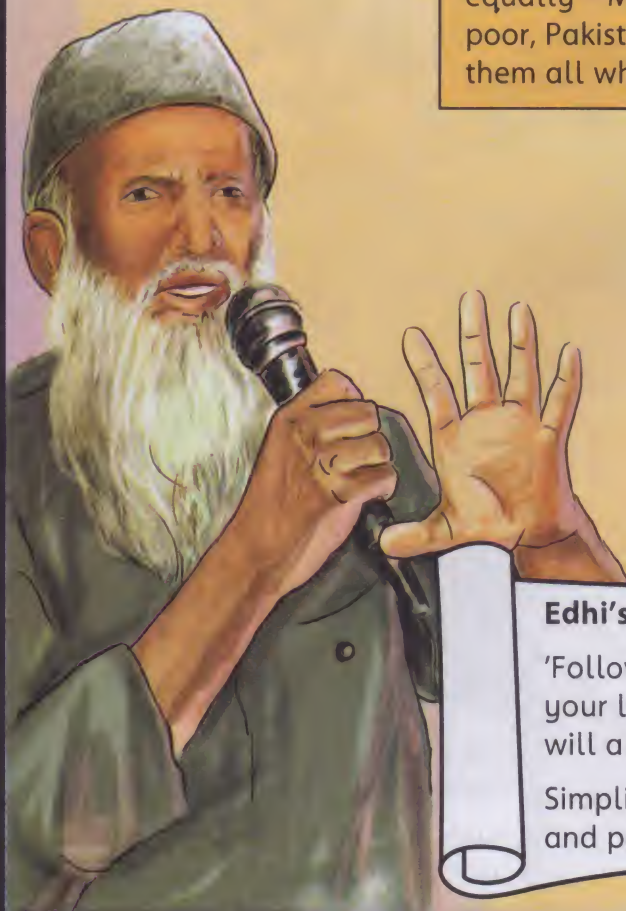




The Ramon Magsaysay medal

Abdul Sattar Edhi and Bilquis Edhi have received many awards for their work. In 1986 they were recipients of the Ramon Magsaysay Award of the Philippines. In 1988 the then Soviet Union awarded them the Lenin Peace Prize. The Pakistan government honoured them with the Nishan-e-Imtiaz. In addition to these, they have received many other national and international awards.

'My work is for all God's creatures, people as well as animals. I treat all people equally—Muslim or non-Muslim, rich or poor, Pakistani or non-Pakistani, I help them all when they are in need.'



#### Edhi's message for children

'Follow these four principles in your life and, God willing, you will always be successful:

Simplicity, honesty, hard work, and punctuality.'



## GRAPHIC STORIES

### ABDUL SATTAR EDHI

Graphic stories are a popular genre of writing in English as well as in many other languages, and popular in many countries. However, there were no locally produced graphic stories in Pakistan in English, Urdu, or any of the regional languages before the publication of *Abdul Sattar Edhi* (OUP) even though the richly pictorial presentation of text in this genre is irresistible to children and youth, and effective in attracting reluctant readers to the world of books.

Based on the life of Pakistan's most outstanding social worker, *Abdul Sattar Edhi* is the first title in a series of Graphic Stories published by Oxford University Press, Pakistan. More titles, each describing the life of a great Pakistani, follow in this series which will be available in both English and Urdu.

**Amina Azfar** has written and compiled textbooks and general reading material for children both in English and in Urdu. In addition she is a translator and has twice received the Hasan Askari Award from Pakistan Academy of Letters for Best Translation Work in Adult Literature. She has been associated with Oxford University Press Pakistan for a number of years as editorial consultant and writer.

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ISBN 978-0-19-906907-1



9 780199 069071  
RS 190